

May 6, 1948

A FEW BASIC PROBLEMS-- POSED WITH SOME BACKGROUND

Reserve

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Please Read Carefully Before

Extension Editors' Advisory Committee Meeting

Theme: Broadening Extension Information Horizons

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I. Objectives of Meeting:

- (1) To discuss problems that are common to workers on the information program of the Cooperative Extension Service, and arrive at recommendations for possible solutions.
- (2) To promote better relationships between Extension information workers (Federal and State) and other USDA agencies responsible for reaching farm people with information on specific programs.
- (3) To improve the dissemination of information through Extension channels, taking into consideration the activities of the Federal, State, and county extension services in using public communication media.

II. Situation

Extension editors, in common with other Extension and educational workers, find themselves today in almost a new world that has materialized since World War II ... a world that is almost beyond comprehension in its complexities and in the forces that are exerting trends understood only vaguely.

Isn't it important that we study and think about these forces and trends? Isn't it important that we determine wherein we ... as leaders of Extension information programs ... can adjust and improve our thinking ... and strengthen our operations ... to blend them more harmoniously into the national picture?

Isn't it vital that we shape our actions, sharpen old tools, and acquire new ones, so that we shall be better fitted to aim our Extension information program more directly and more effectively at the objectives that America and, particularly, rural America, are seeking ... objectives of economic efficiency, better human relations, civic responsibility?

With many more Government agencies and other groups interested in rural welfare, internal as well as broad public relationships are increasingly important.... News must be handled fast and to the point.... Public policies are being developed that affect the lives of every citizen. These need interpretation so people will know the facts and act intelligently upon them. ... Television, facsimile, and FM broadcasting, as well as increased numbers of AM stations, are posing new problems and bringing new opportunities in educational work.

Modern science has brought us new techniques of sampling public opinion, formulas for measuring the readability of our writings, and better methods of studying the results of our educational effort.

We are barely beginning to realize the effective role that audiovisual aids can play in our programs, and we have yet to devise ways for financing them and expertly using many of these new aids.

There is no doubt that the science and art of communication is developing rapidly. America has the most highly organized network for the swift dissemination of ideas. The Cooperative Extension Service is a vital link in that network ... a link that reaches the rural part of the population.

It therefore becomes increasingly obvious that the role of interpreter is a most important one in the difficult job of helping people to understand better the need for change in concepts and practices.

It is against such situations and the challenge to go ahead frankly into enlarged opportunities that we have asked the Extension Editor Committee to meet with us.

The following statement lists a few of many major problems. We hope that the Committee will list other problems, and think through with us some of the approaches that all of us working together might contribute to their solution.

III - Localization Principle

The present trend in the U. S. Department of Agriculture is to recognize more and more the services of the Cooperative Extension Service in getting to farm people the agricultural information they need. Thus the intent of Extension legislation and the memoranda of understanding, which establish the Cooperative Extension Service as the educational arm of the USDA, is being better effectuated than ever before.

We recognize that information on national agricultural programs is effective only when such information is adapted and applied to local situations and problems. On the other hand, the great progress made in the variety of communications media and in their effectiveness has increased amazingly the speed with which agricultural information can be disseminated to the people from a central point. This quickened pace of communication media and the need for advising farm people swiftly on changes in national programs in themselves exert a force toward centralized dissemination of information. Nevertheless, such centralized dissemination does not take into account local knowledge, experience, and psychology, and may in the end defeat the objectives sought.

To this end, every effort should be made to encourage State extension services to interpret national agricultural subject-matter information in terms of local application. Likewise, State extension services have a major responsibility in obtaining, localizing, and disseminating the national subject-matter information that their farm people need.

Extension editors receive copies of all key Department news releases for further local use with weekly and small daily papers which are largely uncovered from Washington, D. C. In many States, the Extension Service is a depository for Department motion pictures. Extension distributes a large part of Department publications. Nearly 2 million copies of food conservation publications and other materials have been distributed in the last 6 months, as requested by the State extension services. The extension editor is considered a major cog in the Department's radio activities. Most of the Department agencies with field staffs have formal agreements or working relations with State extension services.

Wherein and how can these relationships and services be strengthened? What additional services are needed? Are the services now being supplied extension by the Department effective, or are there other services that could be established with better use of time, personnel, and money now invested? Remembering that the Cooperative Extension Service is a three-way proposition (Federal, State, and county), what needs to be done at State levels to improve actions designed to make more successful the principle of localizing national subject matter? At county levels?

IV - Relationships

Relationships with other agencies ... how we can best work together ... are something we have always had and will continue to have with us. Much progress has been made in compromising policy differences growing out of new agencies that came into the field several years ago.

Long-range agricultural legislation, now pending in Congress, will no doubt bring with it new problems of information relationships when the decision of Congress is administratively put into action.

Right now we feel there are three broad areas of information relationship that the committee may want to exchange views and make recommendations on:

- (1) Internal relationship within the land-grant college, particularly with the State experiment station and college news bureaus. If extension does not perform the job of disseminating experiment station information to the reasonable satisfaction of the station administrators, there may be a tendency to set up a separate experiment station staff to do the job. The problem differs in every State, and many times a separate staff may be needed. There is danger, however, of setting up in one State two competing staffs for disseminating popularized information, unless relationships are carefully worked out to the end of best serving the people of the State.

When the Extension Service is popularizing experiment station information, what is the obligation of Extension to the station?
When there is a separate experiment station information staff what should be its job and relationship with the extension editor?

- (2) Relationships with Department agencies are also an important area. Here relationships have largely but not entirely reached the point of carrying out the localization principle discussed in item III above. Wherein are relationships that exist satisfactory? Where is improvement needed to better serve farm people and the public? Are the relationship problems that do exist basic policy problems that must be worked out administratively, or are they in the field of operation details and better personal contact? What information support should the extension editor contribute to national agricultural policies and other national matters that may not involve the localization of technical subject matter?
- (3) Relationships with outside agencies: One such problem several of the editors have suggested for discussion is information relationships with the National Committee on Boys and Girls Club Work. There are a number of others. The National Committee serves as a liaison between business concerns and Extension in obtaining and handling scholarships and other awards the concerns give to winners in regular 4-H projects. In working with Extension to stage the 4-H Congress at Chicago each year the Committee provides 4-H with its greatest public-relations show window. About 350 of the country's leading press, radio, and magazine writers registered at and covered the Congress last year. Reams of press, radio, and magazine copy went out on 4-H.

Did we and the committee do the best possible job to take advantage of this event to further 4-H and service the public? Were there overglamorization, emphasis on advertising, and other results that might have been avoided? What basic principles need to be followed in planning and helping cover informationally such an event? What should be the relationship between the State and Federal Extension 4-H information and other personnel and the National Committee to best plan and handle the Club Congress from public-relations viewpoint?

V. Coordinated Programs

The very nature of extension work is "cooperative," coordinated, combined operations, or whatever you want to call it. As the extension field has broadened constantly since its beginning, there has been a tendency to develop more and more specialized programs.

In recent years there have been more and more talk and action in the realm of coordinated or combined operations programs; broad programs in which administrators, specialists, supervisors, extension editors, and others have a joint hand in planning and effectuating as a unit. Each of us could give many examples, all varying in the degree and breadth of coordination.

One example is the seven-step cotton program in which 13 Southern States and 7 agencies concerned with cotton in the Department cooperated. To us in information, the Federal angles of the program were largely a public-relations kind of backdrop for local action. Before the combined effort, the Department and Extension were being criticized within the Congress, the farm organizations, and the National Cotton Council to the point that we did not have an adequate cotton educational program.

Three years ago a committee of Southern extension directors staked out 10 points. Our office helped them cut it to seven simple steps. All agreed on those points as general steps farmers should take. How to take them was left up to each locality as advised by the county agent.

The cooperation of 16 national organizations was obtained. It became their program, too. The group cooperatively approved and produced a million regional publications; two movies; 1,000 little exhibits; 150 copies of 6 dramatized radio transcriptions; two kits of educational materials, one for extension agents and one for cooperators; newspaper mats; posters; and other aids. This was in addition to local material prepared in the State and county offices.

Southern directors agreed at a recent meeting that the program had taken well. Everybody now knows that we have a cotton educational program. Many of the States were following through at the State and local levels. We had staked out the field, and the farmers as well as the public knew what our program was in simple language. The objectives include slowly broadening the program to include more information on national policy, economics, and balanced farming.

What role should the extension editor play in such combined operations programs? In what fields do we need additional broad coordinated educational program, such as 4-H, health, and the like? Is the specific coordination needed largely a State extension coordination problem, and when is the situation such that broad regional and national coordination on a specific program is needed?

VI. Public Policy

Educational programs of a public policy nature. This subject is one that has been widely discussed in the Report of the Land-Grant College Committee on Postwar Agricultural Policy; in the Kepner report; in various public statements of agricultural leaders; and in a number of State reports. Programs of current interest along these lines, and with direct or indirect implications to agriculture, include the following:

(1) The Economic Cooperation Administration program (ERP); (2) the International Trade Organization and reciprocal trade agreements; (3) long-time agricultural policy; (4) rural health programs; (5) old-age and survivor benefits for rural people under the Social Security Program; (6) rural recreation; (7) Missouri River Basin development; (8) educational programs in the irrigation districts of Western States; and (9) universal military training. Other subjects might be mentioned, and, as all editors know, the list varies from time to time.

A clear-cut statement about Extension's responsibilities in programs of this kind was given by Director Wilson in the article, "Farmers Want To Know Why," appearing in the February issue of the National County Agent. Also, at the annual meeting of the Land-Grant College Association, the papers presented before the Agricultural Section on November 11, served as a good guide for State land-grant colleges to follow in determining their policy.

Some of the practical questions we could well consider are:

- (1) Do you maintain cooperative relations with the departments at your university or college through which public policy materials of current interest can be developed?
- (2) Do they cooperate with the Agricultural Extension Service in making such material available in the State for use in community meetings, farm organization meetings, and the like?
- (3) Do they cooperate with you in preparing materials for the press and radio?
- (4) When we send documents and publications coming from authentic sources, such as the State Department, United Nations, and FAO, to directors and you for State interpretation at the college, do you make practical use of such materials?
- (5) Do you want us to continue sending such documents and material?
- (6) Have you suggestions about getting them condensed, or worked over by a committee here in the Department and forwarded to you?
- (7) Now that we are generally launching an expanded extension health educational program, what educational materials will be needed? Will we have to prepare some of them, and what principles and clearance policies should we follow in Extension? What is the extension editor's role?

VII. Marketing

American farms are at a very high stage of production. If and as wartime needs and foreign demand slacken, we can expect increasing need for an emphasis on use and distribution of what we produce. Surpluses of more farm products may be around the corner, and much thought is being given to marketing, research, and education work; in the Congress, the Department, and the States.

The Extension Service has a tremendous interest here; both in the marketing educational work it has been carrying on and in the new work it and other agencies are undertaking under the new Research and Marketing Act.

We've now gone through a year of basic planning and project writing under the R&M Act. Many new projects are under way, some Federal, some regional, and many stemming from the State experiment station and State extension service. The program is slated to expand next year and has Congress' authorization to grow into more than a 60-million-dollar undertaking, not counting local matching funds.

What is the extension and extension information role in this new research and marketing program? Obviously we have a role in reporting research by the research agencies. That should be similar to our role in reporting research in the past, except that several new elements enter into the Research and Marketing Act. For instance, (1) The Department can contract with outside agencies, including commercial groups, to do needed research; (2) heavy use is being made of Producers-Industries commodity advisory committees; (3) money can be allocated for regional projects and coordinated projects in which several agencies cooperatively participate; (4) direct allotments are being made to Extension to undertake new marketing educational work, such as setting up area or community marketing demonstrations; (5) the act provides for carrying projects on marketing information for consumers; (6) the act gives added emphasis to research and services, especially in marketing.

These differences open up new information opportunities and problems that we need to explore and work out.

What is the proper relationships between the Department and experiment station and extension editors in reporting the results of regional and contract research as well as the more local research and marketing project results? What are the objectives of the extension-operated new marketing projects, and the role of the editor in helping reach those objectives? How much and how soon will pictures, backdrop news stories, and general public relations be needed? How can we best provide for them? What is the extension and extension information role in providing marketing information for consumers? Consumer education in the past has been the delicious-dish, nutritional, advertising kind of appeal to consumers. Wherein will the new marketing-information-consumer education program take a different turn, why, and what turn? What is the extension information job here? What do we need to do to do the job, and what will be the relationship with the FMA Abundant Food Program, Food and Feed Conservation Consumer program, the Consumer-Retailer educational program jointly being launched by home demonstration agents and other programs and groups?

VIII. 4-H Club Work

Probably no Extension Service program has more popular appeal and public support than the 4-H Club program. Read the hearings in Congress that resulted in the Bankhead-Flannagan Act, which authorized 12 million dollars for further expansion of extension work, and much of it sounds like a 4-H Club expansion act.

If we, the Congress, and the people want more 4-H Club work, then we have a challenge to devise 4-H programs, promotional and information techniques included, that will get more 4-H members, keep them longer, and generally make the program more effective as a public service program.

If we continue to do much more than hold our own total 4-H enrollment, with Congress appropriating money for expansion, is there danger that Congress and the public will feel we are unable to devise programs that will expand 4-H work? What are the basic elements of the program that will best do that? What should be the responsibility and relationship between the editor, the 4-H staff, and other extension segments, in contributing ideas to, planning, and carrying out such a program? What materials and national support are needed from the Federal Extension office, and how can they be best planned in cooperation with the States?

IX. Radio

Probably in no field has recent scientific and related development brought us more educational opportunities and challenges than in radio.

The number of AM radio stations has doubled in recent years. Many new, smaller stations are calling on county extension agents for help with farm and home service programs. Television at last is a reality. There are now about 300,000 television sets in operation, a few of them (maybe several thousand) listed as in rural homes. Rapid expansion is expected in both rural and urban sets. Television is now on a network basis and cross-country television broadcast awaits only the completion of coaxial cables and relays, now connecting many major cities. Television program time is rapidly being taken up. Rapid strides in wire and tape recorders are giving us many possibilities for recorded local broadcast and for wire or tape transcription service from either our State or Federal offices.

More than 1,000 State and county extension workers have attended 1- or 2-day radio schools during the last year held by State extension radio specialists in cooperation with our office and the Radio Service.

Do we need more of these schools, and how can we make them more effective?
What can we do to better coordinate and make more effective the number of
extension and related radio studies now under way and being considered? What
do we need most to study in such surveys, and can we agree at least on a
uniform sampling system? How can we best help the local agent who is being
offered more radio time than he can personally handle? Could the county
extension advisory group of farm people help the agent decide which station
he will use to best serve them? How far can and should we go now in television
and how? Should we spend money for television production, costumes, and so on,
or expect the station or advertisers to provide? Should we and how can we
best provide wire or tape recordings as requested or regularly from Washington
for extension editors? From extension editors to county extension agents or
local stations? Should we consider standardizing on a certain wire or tape
recorder at the State level? At the Federal level? What changes should we
make in the USDA radio script service (Farm Flashes) to State editors?

X. Publications

State extension services spend more than a million dollars a year preparing and printing publications. There has been a marked trend in recent years toward shorter, more popular, and visualized leaflets, many with color. The Federal Extension office and many States are paying more attention to simplifying publications, writing them for the reading level of the expected users, but vastly more needs to be done.

The New England extension services have recently cooperated in printing about a dozen publications; other areas have cooperatively printed a few and are considering more. Southern directors at a recent meeting expressed the feeling that if the editors couldn't get a plan for cooperative publications going they would try to devise one. They agreed such a program must have their administrative support as well as cooperation between specialists concerned and editors in the various States. There was agreement that the very basis of cooperative State publications was for each State to develop its publications plans well in advance and exchange those plans.

Are the readability formulas we have the best for measuring farm publications? Do we need research to find how farmers use our publications, and what kinds of publications cause them to adopt more improved practices? Should extension editors write more bulletins? Is more publication help needed from the Federal extension service? What type of help? Can we save money by more States cooperating on regional publications? What is the next best plan for such cooperation? How can we further effectuate coordination between Federal and State publications? How can we best follow through on the progress made at extension publication workshops?

XI. Audio-Visual Aids

There are many people who feel that audio-visual aids are the most under-developed and yet among the most important fields in the extension educational programs, local, State, and Federal. In some way we in extension should be keen enough to take advantage of the tremendous advance in the audio-visual field during and since the war, and of the visual techniques the armed services and war industries use in rapidly doing necessary educational jobs. Our biggest challenge may be one of constantly compromising between the perfected, costly type of aid and the types we can afford. If the aid is going to cost more money than we have budgeted, we constantly have to search for proof that money spent that way will help our agents and our programs more than the same amount spent some other way.

We may need much more study and checking on visual aids. Several months ago, we in the Federal office asked Director Wilson to appoint a Visual Aids Advisory Committee, composed of representatives from each division in our Federal Extension office. That committee, headed by Karl Knaus, is now studying the entire extension visual program. We expect much help from them on visual aids we all agree are needed. They hope to give us their combined ideas on priority principles we should follow in using the small amount of funds we have for visual aids. They also hope to report on the broader type of visual aids program we should try to develop when and if funds are available. We don't feel like asking for more funds for visual aids until we are clearly agreed on what we will do with them. Administrators will be more likely to allot more funds from their crowded budgets if they can clearly see that the intended use is an important one that should pay better dividends than if the money were spent elsewhere.

Are there special problems you would like us to consider in visual aids? How can we best proceed to develop our visual plans after we get the Visual Committee report? Are similar committees needed in each State?

XII. What Do You Think?

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